
ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet



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Pollution Prevention for the Consumer

The rising cost of traditional waste disposal options, landfilling and incineration, has created the need to find newer, more cost-effective and environmentally friendly methods of addressing the generation and treatment of our wastes. Based on their comparative environmental benefits, waste management techniques have been organized into an order of preference for use. At home, we should consider the following concepts when purchasing products or disposing of wastes.

1. **Source Reduction:** Reduce or eliminate waste before it is created
2. **Reuse-Reuse-Reuse:** Give materials and products a second or longer life
3. **Recycling & Composting:** Recover valuable resources

While we commonly use a combination of these strategies, we should try to achieve the highest level within the hierarchy. For example, everyone believes recycling a cardboard box is an excellent option, but it only ranks third in the list. This is because recycling itself is a manufacturing process which requires energy and additional raw materials and creates waste. A better option is to reuse the box, which eliminates the processing recycling requires. Every time a material is reused, it eliminates the need to manufacture an additional new material or to recycle an old one. Buying a product without any cardboard box (source reduction) is the best option of all, because it eliminates the need to manufacture, recycle or dispose of any box. Because source reduction and reuse eliminate or reduce the creation of wastes *before* they become disposal problem, they are considered to be *pollution prevention* strategies. Recycling, composting, waste to energy, incineration and landfilling all treat wastes *after* they have been created and are therefore not as desirable as pollution prevention techniques.

Although applying these waste reduction strategies may seem far removed from our day-to-day lives, these options are, in fact, available for the products we purchase or materials we discard. With a little planning, we as consumers can utilize source reduction and reuse as a normal part of our buying and disposal habits. The following source reduction and reuse ideas are examples of how we can all be environmentally friendly consumers.

Source Reduction

- Buy and maintain durable products. This reduces the need to produce replacement products.
 - Buy appliances with a good repair record and which are easy to disassemble and repair. For example, buy Energy Star electronic equipment from manufacturers with a take-back program.

- Replace hazardous products with non-hazardous substitutes. This is a practice called EPP or “environmentally preferable purchasing,” which is choosing the product that will have a lesser impact on the environment and normal human activity.
 - Avoid buying products that contain hazardous materials and use safe alternatives for common household hazardous products.
 - Be alert to product labels that may indicate that a product is dangerous and requires special disposal considerations.
 - Look for water-based or non-toxic substitutes for products such as paint, furniture stripper and degreasers. For example, homemade laundry detergent has little to no toxic materials and can save money over the course of a year.
- Buy products with the least packaging to reduce the need to manufacture excessive packaging.
 - Avoid “individual” packaging and single-serve items. These packages create large amounts of wastes compared to the actual product they contain. For example, buy a family-size package of snacks and use reusable containers for small portions to save waste.

Also, remember only buy what you need because you can always buy more!

Examples of Reuse

- Purchase reusable items that can replace disposable goods.
 - Consider using sturdy washable utensils and dishes for picnics, parties, and everyday-use both at home and work.
 - Bring your own coffee mug and water glass to work.
 - Instead of their disposable counterparts, use rechargeable batteries, replaceable blade razors, and cloth diapers and napkins.
 - Reach for a sponge or dishcloth, rather than a paper towel, to clean up a spill.
- Reuse products and containers rather than discarding after a single use.
 - Keep a supply of reusable canvas, paper and plastic shopping bags in your car. Some stores even give you a cash rebate for using them.
 - Reuse newspaper, packaging and boxes to ship packages. Use brown paper bags to wrap parcels.
 - Share magazines with neighbors and friends before discarding.

Summary

These waste reduction and reuse techniques are easily implemented and can result in a significant decrease in the volume and toxicity of wastes shipped for incineration and disposal. The benefits of instituting pollution prevention strategies when purchasing and disposing of products are many, including environmental improvement, extended landfill lifespan, and often, economic savings. Many industries now include the environmental effects and disposal costs of a new product as part of their initial design process. As a consumer, you can make the same considerations part of your decision about the packaging and products you purchase, use and ultimately dispose.

For more pollution prevention information, please go to www.des.nh.gov/nhppp/ or contact the N.H. Department of Environmental Services, New Hampshire Pollution Prevention Program at (603) 271-6460 or (800) 273-9469.